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LAYS OF THE HERTFORDSHIRE HUNT

GEORGE ROBINS

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LAYS OF THE HERTFORDSHIRE HUNT

LAYS OF THE HERTFORDSHIRE HUNT

AND OTHER

SPORTING VERSES

BY

GEORGE ROBINS

LONDON:

ARTHUR L. HUMPHREYS

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WITH EVERY HOPE THAT THE SPORT OF THE FUTURE

MAY ECLIPSE THAT OF THE PAST,

THESE VERSES ARE

DEDICATED

TO

THE EARL OF CAVAN, M.F.H.

'A man we all know,
A man we all swear by, a friend of our own,
With hounds running hardest he's safest to go,
And he's always in front, and he's often alone.'

WHYTE-MELVILLE.

960324

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LAYS OF THE HERTFORDSHIRE HUNT.

The Men who have Gone Before.

(*A lay of the Hertfordshire Hunt Club.*)

'TIS meet when we're in merry mood
To let our thoughts hark back
To the men who made our country
And the men who bred our pack.
We reap the fruits their hands have sown,
And Time's effacing flight
Shall naught avail against our vow
To keep their memory bright.

A lady holds the pride of place
In the roll of honour's front;
'Tis the grand old dame of the Cecil house
Who founded the Hatfield Hunt.

A health to the gallant Marchioness! *
The noble name she bore
Still heads the toast we honour most—
'The men who have gone before.'

And next we fill a glass to one
Who knows a world-wide fame;
'The Noble Science' our toast shall be,
And Delmé Radcliffe's † name.
Where Beckford, Vyner, 'Nimrod' stand
He fitly takes his place,
With Surtees and with Somerville—
The classics of the Chase.

And here's to every gallant soul,
To every hound and horse,
That saw the end at Wendover
That day from Kensworth Gorse.‡
To Grimston and to Daniell—
There was but one man more—
So for all the three our toast shall be
'To the men who have gone before.'

* The second Marchioness of Salisbury, who established the Hunt about 1775, and held office until her seventieth year, in 1819.

† Mr. Delmé Radcliffe, author of *The Noble Science of Foxhunting*, Master of the Hertfordshire, 1835–1839.

‡ This famous run, during which hounds covered upwards of thirty miles, occurred during Mr. Delmé Radcliffe's mastership, March 17th, 1837. The Hon. E. Grimston, Mr. Daniell, and the Second Whipper-in (whose name is not recorded) were the only men who saw the finish. A contemporary chronicle puts the point at 28 miles, and the time at 2 hours 35 minutes.

Lord Dacre* claims his mead of praise—
Our Master twice was he—
And the builder of our kennels, too,
The generous Gerard Leigh.†
While of the men of later date
Who ride among us yet
Kingswalden's open-handed squire‡
Not lightly we'll forget.

And hundreds more we honour, too—
Your sire, maybe, and mine:
The men who wore the scarlet
And the men who rode the line.
The huntsmen of an earlier day,
Well versed in kennel lore,
These we applaud, from Wells to Ward—
'The men who have gone before.'

Oh! sportsmen of the present day,
Look to the matter thus:
The country is a heritage
Our fathers left to us.
See that the trust of sevenscore years
Be safely handed on,
And guard the honour of the Hunt
Whose uniform ye don.

* Master from 1839–1866, and (jointly) from 1875–1885.
† Master from 1866–1875.
‡ Mr. Fenwick Harrison, Joint-Master 1898–1901, and Master, 1901–1909.

See that your foxes still be wild,
As those bred by your sire;
See that your face be set against
The thrice-accursèd wire.
So shall the glories of the Chase
Wax ever more and more,
And praise ye shall earn from your sons in turn
As 'the men who have gone before.'

Sharpenhoe Knowl.

MINE be the song of the hill-fox in January,
Staking his life on his stoutness and speed,
Scorning the woodlands to right and to left of him,
Seeking the hills in the hour of his need.
Maybe you found him at Tingrith or Toddington,
Maybe from Maulden's famed cover he stole,
Facing the vale since his hills lie to South of it,
Setting his head straight for Sharpenhoe Knowl.

See how they drive down the Pulloxhill pasture-lands!
Gallant old Whimbrel* and Wary drop back—
Youth will be served when its 'sterns down and hackles up'—
Sanguine and Sally are leading the pack.
Fastest of horses must gallop to live with them,
Gaping vale ditches are taking their toll,
Look to yourself, now, old traveller in front of them,
If you would ever see Sharpenhoe Knowl!

Whoop! He's to ground, and the bitches are baulked of him;
Hark how they bay round the earth on the hill!
Forty-five minutes, and never a check in it—
Even the thrusters have had all they will.

* Poor old Whimbrel was killed on the line at Ampthill on February 28th, 1912, but she well deserves such posthumous honour as my verse can afford her.

Well he has beaten them, fairly and gallantly,
Made good his point and won home to his goal:
There was he bred, and there fitly finds sanctuary
Under the shadow of Sharpenhoe Knowl.

Here's to the hill, and the foxes that run to it;
Long may 'The Clappers' stand square to the gale,
Landmark for all men from Weston to Westoning,
Keeping good guard o'er the Harlington vale.
Here's a full glass to the sportsmen whose home it is,
Luck to the acres that own their control;
Long may the litters be bred in security,
Long may they farm under Sharpenhoe Knowl.

A Ballad of Baron Dacre.*

FROSTY and grey the morning dawned
And a bitter North wind blew,
And the wild-fowl skimmed o'er a frozen lake
In the park at Kimpton Hoo,
And the bold Lord Dacre looked in wrath
On the land where the white mist lay,
But his gentle lady craved as a boon
That he rode not out that day.
'You shall come to harm on the ice-bound roads,'
Said she, 'an ye venture forth,
And Silsoe lies under Ampthill town,
Full seven leagues to the North.'
Lord Dacre's heart was sad, I ween,
As he granted his lady's prayer,
For his eye was bright and his heart right young,
In spite of his silvered hair.
'But whether I go or stay,' quoth he,
Come frost, come snow, come mist,
I swear by Hugo Meynell's horn
My hounds shall keep their tryst.'
And forth he hath sent a messenger,
At a good steed's fleetest pace,

* Although the date of this fine run and extraordinary coincidence has been lost sight of, the facts are exactly as recorded in the ballad. The writer had the story from the present Master, who had it from his father.

To bid his huntsman take the road
And hie to the trysting-place.
And this was the rede his Master sent,
If by any means he may,
He shall find a fox and hunt a fox,
And kill a fox that day.

* * * *

It was the hour of the mid-day meal,
At the full of high noontide,
And the Baron bold he sat at meat
With his lady by his side.
He sat him down to the plenteous cheer,
But he started up amain:
Quoth he, 'An I hear not Bob Ward's horn
May I never hunt fox again!'
And e'en as he spoke, through the startled air
The loud 'who-whoop!' there pealed,
That speaks the death of a gallant fox
When he dies in open field.
Forth to the park Lord Dacre sped,
And looked with wondering eye,
Where Bob Ward stood with his baying pack,
And a great fox held on high.
'What make you here with hound and horn?'
The Baron spake in wrath,
'Lies Silsoe not under Ampthill town,
Full seven leagues to the North?
If ye have not keep to the tryst this day
I hold by the oath I swore,
And, though your skill were as Nimrod's own,
Ye shall hunt my hounds no more.'

Sharp and loud as the thunder peals
  Was the Baron's wrath outpoured,
But broad and bland as the sun at noon
  Was the smile of old Bob Ward.
'We found him in Buckle Grove, my lord,
  And he set his mask due South;
I had never a need to cheer a hound,
  Or to set my horn to my mouth.
They carried a head, they drove, they raced,
  'Twere a gallant sight to see,
Till "Leader" nailed him by yonder gate,
  My lord, and—here he be!'

* * * *

Woe for the glades of Buckle Grove,
  Which the foxes once possessed!
For the pheasant rules in selfish state
  In the lordly park at Wrest.
But I look that the day shall surely dawn
  (Heaven speed it on apace!)
When its lord shall come to his own again,
  For well he loves the chase.
The stout Bob Ward* is lowly laid
  With his faithful horse and hound,
And he waits the day of the last great meet
  When the last dread horn shall sound.
And few be left who have heard his cheer,
  But his memory still lives on;

* Charles Ward, always known as 'Bob,' hunted the Hertfordshire Hounds for forty years (1844-1884). He was originally trained in the Burton country, under the great Osbaldeston, and was subsequently with the Cambridgeshire and Lord Southampton before coming to Lord Dacre.

And our sons shall speak of his prowess yet
When a hundred years are gone.
The Bold Lord Dacre sleeps in peace,
With his lady by his side;
But as long as a foxhound follows a fox
We shall speak his name with pride.
And a Brand of his line wears scarlet yet,
As his sons shall wear it too;
May they ride in front in as good a hunt
To their park at Kimpton Hoo.

Ivinghoe Hill.

HERE, where three counties join hands in alliance,
Terrace on terrace and glade upon glade,
Ashridge looms up like a keep of the giants,
Buttressed with beech woods from Aldbury to Gade.
Northwards the vale stretches smiling and spacious,
Spurs of the Chilterns the far distance fill;
Never held dreamland a prospect more gracious:
Sunlight and shadow on Ivinghoe hill.

Here, uneffaced by two thousand years' weather,
Scarred on the chalk down and stamped in the clay,
Linking the Eastland and Westland together,
Runs the long line of the great Ickneild Way.
Here, in the days of the dawning of history,
Marched the Iceni to plunder and kill;
Over it all hangs the glamour of mystery:
Shades of the past under Ivinghoe hill.

Yonder's the knoll where the beacon was lighted,
Northward and eastward the red message runs:
'Philip's tall ships in the Channel are sighted;
Arm, for your country hath need of her sons!'

Straightway they rose and flung back the Armada.
Lives the same spirit within our hearts still?
Can England muster such champions to guard her?
Mists of the future round Ivinghoe hill.

Hush! A brown form through the gorse stems is stealing,
Off to the vale with a wave of his brush!
Heedless of aught that the future's concealing,
Back to the present we come with a rush.
One ringing shout to the horsemen who follow,
Waking the woods till they echo and thrill;
Now the horn answers: Hark holloa! hark holloa!
Huntsman and hound upon Ivinghoe hill.

Hertfordshire Sampler.

By Mr. Wroughton's Spanker—South Cheshire Tarnish.
Whelped 1905.
Champion Dog Hound at Peterborough, 1907.
Died 1912.

'WITH a Corbet to guide us we cannot go wrong,'
And the truth of the old song's shown,
For the credit of Sampler's breeding rests
On the South Cheshire Kennel alone;
But puppyhood's days he'd the luck to spend
In the best of walks at Porter's End,
Where plenty of Hertfordshire milk would tend
To give him size and bone.

And he grew and furnished in every way
That hound-men most desire,
In symmetry and in quality,
In substance, scope, and fire.
And he showed in his work that for nose and drive
You could match him with any hound alive,
Till they said at the great show he should strive
For the honour of Hertfordshire.

So he went to the flags at Peterboro'
For the world to praise or blame,
And his splendid rivals mustered strong
From every kennel of fame.

Warwickshire, Brocklesby, Grafton's best,
Beaufort and Cattistock up from the West,
Milton and Meynell, and all the rest,
The pick of England came.

To which of the broad grass-acred shires
Shall the Championship go back?
There were some who swore by the Cottesmore blood,
And some by the Pytchley crack.
But the judges' verdict doubt dispels
And a jealous murmur of wonder swells,
For the Champion Cup goes home with Wells*
To the old plough-country pack.

The grass grows green on the old dog's grave,
But endless the good he wrought,
For his sons and his daughters flourish yet,
His legacy to sport.
First on the flags when the pack is drawn,
First in the field when they fly to the horn,
I tell you that huntsmen still unborn
Shall swear by the Sampler sort.

They have run for a hour, but they check at last,
And the cast is made in vain;
But see that hound of the Belvoir tan,
Who speaks to it up the lane!

* William Wells hunted the Hertfordshire Hounds for sixteen seasons (1893–1909). He had previously whipped-in to the following packs during a career which started in 1863, viz., Lord Portsmouth's, Brocklesby, V. W. H., Heythrop, Quorn, and Belvoir. He was also huntsman to the Puckeridge from 1882–1893.

Then 'hoic to the Sampler bitch' they cry,
And on to the cheer her comrades fly,
And another fox is doomed to die
  By the staunch old Sampler strain.

They have raced four miles with a scent breast-high,
  They have distanced every steed;
Now on the hill they catch a view,
  And the flyers show their speed.
Then out from the pack with quickened stride
A couple of hounds press side by side,
And two of his sons claim place of pride
  For stout old Sampler's breed.

The Place and the Man.

(A Lay of the Litany Bushes.)

THE place—we all know it, the Romans before us did,
Totternhoe's ramparts above it look down;
Watling Street runs to the North in full view of it,
Hard by the outskirts of Dunstable town.
Never a gunshot disturbs its tranquillity,
Never a cur-dog its privacy mocks;
This takes first rank as yet,
Never drawn blank as yet,
Haunt of the rabbit and home of the fox.

The man—we all know him—how cheery his welcome
When meeting at Tilsworth we ride to the fray;
And still more familiar to many among us,
The view of his *back* when its 'forrard away!'
Whether the line be for Leighton or Toddington,
Long hunting run or a ten-minute burst,
Timber or ditch it is,
Never mind which it is,
Bet you a fiver the Colonel goes first!

This is the toast I would ask you to honour then—
You who love fences strong-growing and tall:
'Dunstable's vale and the man who has "made" it,
The man who can cross it the best of us all.'

Eighteen times running we've found at the Litany—
Show me a record beats that if you can;
Covert well tended
And sportsman so splendid,
Then long may they flourish—the Place and the Man!

Our Friends the Farmers.

LET the city-bred pessimist wear a long face,
And prove us (by figures) a decadent race,
Two things to the honour of England remain—
The thoroughbred horse and the old yeoman strain.
Then proudly may Hertfordshire hold up her head,
For five classic winners at Childwick were bred;
And for fair open dealing and genuine worth
The Hertfordshire farmer's the salt of the earth.
Our field through the season is never complete
If a score of staunch yeomen are not at the meet,
And when hounds mean business they're mostly in front—
The farmers who follow the Hertfordshire Hunt.

Then hundreds of others our sport never share,
For they haven't the time or the money to spare;
But the true sporting spirit they well understand,
And a red coat's a passport all over their land.
Good health and good markets I'd wish to them all,
If their holdings are large or their acreage small;
Good luck to their crops and good luck to their kine,
May their Aprils be moist and their Augusts be fine.
I've known them a lifetime, but hardly I met
A knave or a churl of their company yet,
Though, like every good man, they'd resent an affront—
The farmers who welcome the Hertfordshire Hunt.

Hunting folk, by your leave, I've a moral for you:
Be courteous, be careful, be generous too;
Shut gates and shun ewes, and, oh, never forget
'Ware beans all the time and 'ware seeds when it's
wet.
Buy forage from farmers that hunters may eat
The oats that were trod by their galloping feet.
Put your hand in your pocket, and don't be afraid
When the Royal Benevolent asks for your aid.
So haply some day when misfortunes befall,
As they will in bad seasons the best of us all,
You may help in enduring adversity's brunt
Some farmer who welcomed the Hertfordshire Hunt.

To One who went Home Early.

(*An Echo of the Dancing Season.*)

IF all of us always thought the same, 'twere a dreary world and a glum,
As the Roman wrote it, 'de gustibus non est disputandum.'
Let us go the ways that our hearts incline, for the world to all is free,
So we'll wish each other the best of luck and agree to disagree.

* * * *

For *you* are the lights of the rose-decked room and the rhythmic fall of feet,
The lilt of the waltz that is sometimes sad, but is always passing sweet.
Riot of beauty, silks, and gems, and the eyes that starlike shine,
Mirrored more bright on a festal night in the glint of the golden wine.
The clasp of the hand as a tale untold, the glance like a song unsung
That has thrilled the pulse of a million men since the days when the world was young.

To dance a deal—to love a little, till dawn an ending brings,
These be your choice and in these rejoice, for they are goodly things.

* * * *

For *me* who am stiff of tongue and limb, with a streak of grey in the hair,
Whose foot in the dance were all uncouth as the foot of a grizzly bear:
For me who have done with all these things, their ecstasy and pain,
In the autumn glow of a middle age, these other things remain.
For me is the sport of the afternoon that the many never knew,
When the babbling crowd of the morning meet gives place to the faithful few.
For me is the deep and savage note from the brambled dell hard by,
When Caliph speaks to a fox afoot, and the whole pack score to cry.
For me that splendour of sound and sight in the misty eventide,
When twenty couple o' great dog-hounds crash out from the covert-side.
For me is the thrill of the wild 'who-whoop' when the fox's race is run,
And the grim pack bay for their lawful prey in the light of the setting sun.

For me the long jog darkling home, heedless of
wind and rain,
Huntsman and hound all clustered round—for me
these things remain.

* * * *

Let us go where our several hearts incline, for the
way of the world is free,
And we'll wish each other the best of luck and
agree to disagree.

Bulls Green.

(*A Lay of the Monday Country.*)

I'VE seen some long hunts and some very quick things
From Danesbury and Romerleys* and Wymondley Springs.
I've a mask on the wall there that catches my eye
Of a dog-fox from Dowdells that Knebworth saw die.
But for genuine hunting commend me, I pray,
To a meet at Bulls Green on a good scenting day.

The hard-riding youngster may grumble and groan,
And hunger for fame and a cleft collar-bone;
But the joy of the woodlands for me never fades,
And the cry of the pack as they drive down the glades,
And when we're away on the Stapleford side
Young Sparks must stop talking and sit down to ride.

You may try Alexanders or trot to Priest Wood,
Widows Bushes or Bramfield, the same thing holds good,
You'll hear hounds give tongue as a matter of course,
And just watch the man on the big chestnut horse,

* Locally pronounced 'Umleys.'

For his face is alight with a smile at the thought
That his coverts once more are proved staunch to
the sport.

I am sick of the cant of political creeds,
Of speeches and articles nobody reads;
Of 'popular' measures that nobody likes,
Of die-hards and do-naughts and tariffs and strikes.
But a squire of broad acres who wears a red coat,
Whatever his views, is the man for *my* vote.

A Plea for the Provinces.

'For I count the swell provincial lower than the Melton muff.'
BROMLEY-DAVENPORT.

OH, sportsman-poet, dear to our hearts as to those of a byegone day,
I would join issue with you for this, these lines that you wrote in play,
Though Ranksboro' Gorse shall be holy ground as long as the Chase endures,
For the fame of the hunt to Woodwell Head in those stirring lines of yours.
Though the Shires be the shrine of fox-hunting, cradle of sport and throne,
Ill fare the day when they hunt the fox in Leicestershire alone.
Then should the Chase lose pride of place as the sport that all men knew,
And sink to a mere exotic cult as the pastime of the few:
For we make our boast of a *national* sport that all men understand,
With its roots deep down in a people's heart all over our English land.
There is never a farm so far away or a hamlet so remote
But welcomes the day when hounds go by or the sight of a scarlet coat.

From the moor where the Western rivers rise to
the fen-lands East of Trent,
From the frowning crags of Cumberland to the
garden fields of Kent,
We ride to hounds on every soil where a horse-
hoof may be put,
And where never a horse may safely stand we
hunt the fox afoot.
Oh, you who come from the 'sea of grass' for a
day in the land of plough,
We would show you the best of the lesser sport
our lesser means allow:
At the festal board, at the covert-side, a welcome,
an honoured guest,
Free when hounds run, as all are free, to prove
yourself the best.
But this we ask of your courtesy: you should ever
bear in mind,
We too take pride in the pack we know with its
record of years behind.
Though Belvoir's ducal coronet your coat should
proudly bear,
It is no Hunt of a lesser date whose livery *we* wear.
Though we needs must creep where we cannot fly,
though scent on our ploughs lies cold,
There be hounds as staunch in the Provinces and
hearts as keen and bold,
Though yours be the true champagne of sport and
for us is the ale instead,
There be foxes as stout in Hertfordshire as ever
the Hemploe bred.

Pasture and tillage, holt and hill, we know them and find them good,
From the breeding earths at the Roaring Meg to the depths of Bricket Wood;
From the North, where the pines stand sentinel round Woburn's circling wall,
To the South, where the oaks of Hatfield guard a yet more stately hall.
And I think no sportsman worth the name shall hold the man in scorn
Who rides to hounds as his fathers rode in the home where he was born.

To an Old Hunting Diary.

WITHIN a bookshelf richly stored with annals
of the Chase,
A little tattered manuscript can claim an honoured
place:
It tells of sport in Hertfordshire while thrice ten
seasons ran,
And '94 completes the tale that '65 began.
Oh, dear dead hand that held the pen, lightly your
task has sped
If you had known how eagerly your records would
be read!
And thinking of those early days and how you
played your part,
One wish, in all sincerity, is ever in my heart:
That I may serve the cause of Sport, as you before
have done,
And wear the scarlet worthily, as should befit your
son.

The Man who holds open the Gate.

WHEN you come down to breakfast for hunting arrayed
There's never a minute to spare;
Your flask must be filled and your sandwiches made,
And a hat must be chosen with care.
But though you have plenty of things to arrange,
And nobody likes to be late,
Remember to pocket your stock of small change
For the man who holds open the gate.

He comes from the sheep-pen, he leaves the plough's tail,
Drops bill-hook and spade for a sight
Of the fox-hunting folk as they sweep down the vale,
A pageant of scarlet and white.
And though you may be in a hurry to pass
And haven't a moment to wait,
Find time for a word and the price of a glass
To the man who holds open the gate.

It is well to be courteous for courtesy's sake,
But always remember, I pray,
That to play the curmudgeon's a stupid mistake,
For we live in democracy's day:

And maybe the time isn't very remote
When Fox-hunting's future and fate
Will depend on the hearty goodwill (and the vote)
Of the man who holds open the gate.

'The Crane.'

Who has never once 'missed his turn' in the last four seasons.

SHORT on the leg and well ribbed up,
Long in the neck and rein,
For shoulders or quarters better made
You could search the land in vain;
Standing fourteen three and a half,
That's the way with 'The Crane.'

Never turned his head at a fence,
Or tired under thirteen stone;
Once he fell, in a hundred days,
And the fault was mine, I own;
We'd been going for half an hour best pace,
'Twas timber and he was blown.

Twelve o'clock and a morning fox
In a burst that's sharp and short,
Though we do our best at getting a start,
We're pretty safe to be caught;
For the poor little 'Crane' can't go the pace
With the long-legg'd, long-tailed sort.

Four o'clock in the afternoon,
And scent is better, I'll swear;
The long-legg'd nags are thinking of home—
They are some of them half-way there;
But the stout little 'Crane' is taking his jumps,
With a couple of feet to spare.

Off to the meet when the morning's young,
Maybe a twelve-mile hack;
He doesn't strike for an 'eight-hour day,'
But keeps an eye on the pack.
When the order's given that hounds go home,
That's when 'The Crane' starts back.

Stepping it out on the homeward road,
Debonair still and gay;
Never a drop of his gruel left,
Nor an oat nor a wisp of hay.
And he's ready, I swear, if you needed him,
To do it again next day.

Look to it, you who would serve the State,
This is the type to breed.
When ye can show ten thousand such,
Ye shall earn our thanks indeed;
For they will not falter, or fail, or tire
In the hour of England's need.

A Lament for the Lady of Lilley.

THERE'S a most unmistakeable holloa,
And a glimpse of an uplifted hat,
And the quick ones slip on to the gateway,
While the slow ones are asking, 'What's that?'
And Oliver, eager but anxious,
Is blowing the bitches away;
But where is the Lady of Lilley,
Who was wont to be first in the fray?

Brown habit maybe and a chestnut,
Or a bay and a habit of blue;
The neatest, the smartest, the keenest,
The foremost with hounds running, too.
Though the pastures of Pytchley are peerless,
And perfect Lord Annaly's pack,
To our cold-scenting, warm-hearted country,
Oh, Lady of Lilley, come back!

The Puppy-walker Prophesies.

(*A Lay of the Last of the 'Samplers.'*)

SAMSON and Sarah, puppies both,
Show yourselves good and grateful,
Rally to each meal nothing loth,
Finish the tasty plateful
So shall you earn a meed of praise
By your symmetry and merit,
For the hand that tended your youthful days,
And the blood that you inherit.

And I find it ever a cheering thought,
In spite of the cynic's laughter,
That thus we are sowing the seeds of sport,
To reap the grain hereafter;
That here may be fostered many a run,
And many a game fox beaten
(As the battle of Waterloo was won
In the playing fields at Eton).

Much must you learn of thong and horn,
Riot and rate and blunder,
Ere you come to the fateful hunting morn,
When you doubt for a while and wonder;

Till the blood you boast in every vein
  Takes fire at the cry sonorous,
And instinct, born of the foxhound strain,
  Shall bid you swell the chorus.

I shall not be there when you show in front
  With never a rival near you,
But wiser eyes shall watch you hunt,
  And worthier voices cheer you.
And when they say you were staunch and fast,
  I shall know that the thought inspired you
Of the home where your puppyhood was passed,
  And the grand old hound that sired you.

A Rhyme with a Reason.

'Since one fox on foot more diversion will bring
Than twice twenty thousand cock-pheasants on wing.'
EGERTON-WARBURTON.

THERE'S a place we all know well
Where stout brambles grow well,
We'd draw it at least once a week if we could;
For any old stager
Is open to wager
A fox is forthcoming from Boundary Wood.

I'd venture my guinea,
Though 'tis but a spinney;
And a word in your ear why our luck there holds good:
For a real fox-lover
Is lord of that cover,
And *that's* why we find 'em in Boundary Wood.

Now, if all covert-owners
Would take the same tone as
This one, and if keepers all well understood
They must either show foxes
Or pack up their boxes,
We'd find them elsewhere as in Boundary Wood.

The Odd-jobs Men.

PITY the men who pay the claims,
Their lot is sometimes hard
When Reynard's at his little games
In every poultry-yard.

Their tempers must be placid or
They never can succeed;
The tact of an ambassador
They'll very often need.

They learn the cost of everything,
And have it cut and dried:
What Aylesbury ducks are worth in spring,
And geese at Christmastide.

And what's the market price of eggs,
And when the pullets lay;
And why some foxes have two legs
(For then they need not pay).

And they must know when earths are drawn
And where the vixen prowls,
And neighbouring henwives straightway warn
To guard their precious fowls.

And, though they must not seem to pry
On things behind the scenes,
They keep an ever-watchful eye
On 'Mr. Velveteens.'

And, though they know the rascal lied,
And know the cubs are gone,
Must smile upon the vulpicide—
And catch him later on!

They give their time, they give their skill,
They count the trouble naught;
They do it with a right good will,
Because they love the sport.

To our Huntsman on Going Abroad.

TELL me not, Wells, I am unwise
That at the covert-side,
Resounding with your cheery cries,
No more awhile I ride.

True, a new quarry now I chase,
The somewhat stupid 'jack;'
And follow at a milder pace
A far inferior pack.

Yet the decision is not rash
That both of us deplore:
I really had not got the cash
To hunt there any more.

Fort St. George, Madras. 1900.

I.

A Remonstrance (to Rosie).

I ALWAYS admired you, 'twas Love at first sight,
How smoothly you sailed to the front,
And took your own line in the very first flight
Right bang at the top of the Hunt.
You went a bit faster than others, of course,
And you liked to be given your head,
But I hate 'em too slow, whether woman or horse,
And I do like 'em both thoroughbred.

I never ill-used you, for rowel-less spurs
Your dignity could not disturb,
And I'm certain, unless my poor memory errs,
I never made use of the curb.
But yet, without giving me warning at all,
You stopped being friendly and kind,
And flouted and tricked me, and made me look small,
In the nastiest way you could find.

There were hundreds of people I knew within sight,
You paid no attention to that.
My breeches and boots were a masterpiece quite,
And I had on my very best hat.
You looked as demure and as douce as a dove,
Your temper was warranted sweet,
'It was all very well to dissemble your love,'
But why buck me off at the meet?

II.

A Reply.

I M sorry you still find the subject so sore,
But really I had some excuse;
The saddle was cold, and 'lawn' meets are a bore,
And you were sitting *rather* too loose.
You're not a bad sort, I don't think, as boys go,
And I never intended to vex,
But I have my caprices at times, don't you know,
Like all of the Feminine sex.

The plough was quite soft, so you couldn't be hurt,
I knew it would be a surprise,
And you *did* look so comic, all covered with dirt,
And your hat battered over your eyes.
Just learn to sit back when it comes to the pinch
(You'll find my advice pretty sound),
And don't trust a horse or a woman one inch,
Unless you are sure of your ground.

Before the day's business has rightly begun,
I must have my fling if I choose;
But tell me now, fairly, when hounds really run,
Did you ever once know me refuse?
I've carried you well, you must own, once or twice,
So I think I have made you amends;
Just find me a carrot, or something else nice,
Rub my nose, make it up, and be friends.

How I lost the Gallopabad Cup.

WHAT a field we had for the Station Cup
The year that it first was run!
I meant to win it on 'Bumblepup'
(He started at ten to one).
Not a button or strap was out of place,
And my scarf was neatly tied;
It needs some taste to *dress* for a race,
While any young fool can ride.

I was calm and cool at the post that day,
'Mid pallor and beating hearts;
But 'Bumblepup' kept breaking away,
And spoilt a dozen starts.
And the starter's face grew mulberry-red
And his language very strong,
For he called me a 'damned young dunderhead,'
But I knew that he *must* be wrong.

The race was run like a frantic dream,
And the stand was reached at last,
The bookies shout and the backers scream
As the field comes flashing past.
There was never a horse near 'Bumblepup'
As we cantered past the post;
I had 'finished alone' for the Station Cup!—
'Twas a splendid feat to boast.

'Yet the Cup was lost,' I hear you say;
'What, couldn't you draw the weight?'
Ah, well, I never returned to weigh,
So the real facts I'll state:
My horse was 'slow as a man' I own,
And never was in the hunt,
So the rest of the field, when I 'finished alone,'
Were—seventy yards in front!

Black Bess.

Being the Story of John Smith, of the 1st Class Army Reserve, late Corporal in the East Yorkshire Company of Mounted Infantry.

STORY, lads, what! another still?
There's little that's left to tell.
You've heard of the fight at Bothaville,
And how Le Gallais fell;

I've told you how Diamond Hill was won,
And Prinsloo run to ground,
And how we saved the pom-pom gun
With Brandt's commando round.

But I'll spin you a yarn of a different kind
To the ones you've had before:
A tale of the days when peace was signed
And we got our beer once more.

Down by the Modder the Regiment lay,
Resting the winter through,
And in honour of Coronation Day
They got up a race or two.

They wanted our cash, those Dutchmen there,
And they didn't much mind how;
Rifle to rifle we'd licked 'em square,
But they meant getting even now.

So they sent for a horse to Kimberley town,
One bred for it, trained, and tried,
And they carted a Hebrew bookie down
And a Kaffir boy to ride.

And they fixed the scale for the open race
Catch weights nine stone or more,
When there wasn't a white man in the place
Who could ride below 10.4.

They reckoned the horse could hardly lose,
He'd nothing to beat you see
But a couple of moderate local screws
And a nag from the A.S.C.

While the last name down on the list to run
It troubled 'em even less,
They were rather inclined to be making fun
Of our old mare 'Black Bess.'

Her shoulders heavy, her back ribs light
Unclipped, untrained, unknown,
She was hardly the sort you would back on sight
For the sake of her looks alone.

But she never had failed in the hour of need,
And she'd trekked with us many a day;
So we guessed that the mare had a turn of speed,
And we knew she was sure to stay.

'Master Ben' was the big brown's name,
And they thought he was bound to win,
So they squared the Bookie to play their game,
And of course they all stood in.

'Eights bar one' was the offer made,
And he wouldn't lay the brown;
But, bless you, we weren't in the least afraid,
And we planked our dollars down.

For we knew that the mare and the man would try
And they couldn't be beat for pluck;
So the Captain mounted and cantered by,
And we gave him a cheer for luck.

Off! and the racehorse showed his speed,
He led from the start almost,
He was out by himself with a four lengths lead
As they came to the half-mile post.

The Dutchmen shouted for 'Master Ben,'
For they reckoned the race was won;
But the Captain called on the black mare then,
And brought her with one long run.

Straight as a die she ran of course,
Though the whip was out at last;
She went right up to the big brown horse
As the distance post was past.

She went right up to the leader's girth,
And she held him, stride for stride,
Came through on the rails with the inside berth,
And the boy sat down to ride.

But the mare could stay with the very best,
She was bred to be game and stout,
And the Captain rode like a man possessed,
And she won by a neck all out.

There's my story: the moral's coined,
And easy for all to see,
How a Kaffir, a Jew, and a Dutchman joined,
And a soldier beat the three.

My call, lads, and it's ale all round,
Full tankards and nothing less,
For I'll give you '*The day when the King was crowned*
And the Captain rode "Black Bess."'

Ponyland.

THERE'S a tract of forest and furzy down
Where Hampshire slopes to the south,
From the quays of grey Southampton town
Well nigh to the Avon's mouth.
A fastness of nature still unspoiled,
A remnant of English land
That the dust of the motor has not soiled
Nor the builder's vandal hand.
Her beauties in spring are manifold,
But fairest of all to see
When her kirtle of green is turned to gold
By the autumn's alchemy.
Oh, the vert and the venison still abound,
And the roe deer and the red,
Though many a king has cheered a hound
Since Tyrrell's shaft was sped.
And as long as the love of a horse remain
Shall England honour the fair demesne
Where the pony folk are bred.

There's a Monday in August every year
That's a true red-letter day,
When the ponies come from far and near,
Sopley and Hale and Sway.
Ponies shaggy and ponies trimmed,
Ponies tiny and tall,
Angel-tempered and iron-limbed,
Mares, foals, fillies, and all.

Stalwart ones in a forest truck,
Galloping ones that go
To try their pace and to prove their pluck
At the famous Burley Show.
And the squires of the Forest ride a race
With the men of the Forest there;
For the spirit of sport that rules the place
Makes equals everywhere.
And never a suffragette demurs
When one of His Majesty's Ministers
Gets home with a length to spare!

Oh, the crowded street and the busy pen
Are a life that some hold good,
Where a man must jostle his fellow-men
For a hard-earned livelihood.
But I left *my* heart where the ponies are,
Hock-deep in the bracken fern,
Where Burley Beacon looks afar
To the pine-clad ridge of Hurn.
And I dream of the day when I'll get me back
To the life that I understand,
To a cottage far from the beaten track
In the heart of Ponyland.
Fearless and free the ponies graze
Wandering to and fro,
And they care no whit for the bitter days
When the winds of winter blow.
The dear little, lovable Forest folk,
Sturdy and strong as the English oak,
That grows where the ponies grow.

An Oxford Aftermath.

SWEET city adored and held holy
By sons that are grateful and true,
Where ages have crystallised slowly
The mystical cult of 'the Blue.'
Grey tower, where the dawn's rosy fingers
Rest first as she mounts from the sea,
How fondly my memory lingers,
Dear Magdalen on thee.

Oh! summers, with luxury laden—
A turmoil of picnics and fêtes!—
Oh! annually-altering maiden
We always adored in the Eights!
When life was a limitless chorus,
And forethought a failing for fools,
Though ever there floated before us
The spectre of 'Schools.'

Now, far from those precincts of pleasure,
In a world where a debt is a sin,
One solace is left to my leisure—
The bills that each morning brings in;
For some are too recent for saving,
And some are too pressing to burn,
But all are possessed of a craving
For 'cheques by return.'

How clearly they open a vista
  Of pleasures as each one is conned:
A bill for a horse with the Bicester,
  A bill for the breeches I donned;
And bills for my bats and my racquets,
  For wine when we meant to be gay,
For sedative powders in packets
  We took the next day.

Oh, letters of tradesmen and lawyers!
  Oh, threats of collector and dun!
Old bills I have owed three or four years,
  New debts that are hardly begun.
Oh, web of extravagant tissue!
  Oh, dregs of my 'Varsity cup!
How sorely the debtor will miss you
  When all is paid up!

When many bills dwindle to few bills,
  As I settle them bit after bit,
With conscience unclouded by new bills,
  And desk unadorned by a writ,
Bewailing the end of life's summer
  I curse the conventional plan
Whereby every boy must become a
  Respectable man.

1900.

A Farewell to Fox-hunting.

THE last long note of the horn dies down
At the close of the April day,
And the hounds turn back to the distant town
That lies on their homeward way.
Only a pause till the seasons wane,
Then hey! for the autumn morn,
When the slumbering woodlands wake again
To the clamour of hound and horn!
Again ye shall muster one and all
Ere the reapers cease to glean;
But I shall be deaf to that joyous call
With the width of the world between.

But my heart will be here on the day of days
When October's left behind,
And you jog once more down the bridle-ways
To the copse where we always find.
When the whimper swells to a crashing cry,
And the gorse-stems bend and sway;
Till there at the corner 's a cap held high,
And a big dog-fox away.
Then striding over the ditch and rail
On the new blood hunter's back,
With all the best of the start you sail
On the lea of the flying pack.

There by the wash of an alien tide
  Wistfully I shall dream
Of a wind-swept English country-side,
  Where the white and scarlet gleam.
Of far-off days in that far-off land
  When the savour of life was sweet;
When sport and love went hand-in-hand
  (Was Cupid Green the meet?)
Never was boy with heart so gay,
  Never was maid so fair—
One on the dear old three-legg'd grey,
  One on the chestnut mare.

Gallant horses and glorious sport!
  How can I well complain?
Here's to the day when more are bought,
  Ready to start again.
Binder and brook may do their worst,
  Hounds may be running fast,
I'll be away with the few at first,
  Still to the front at last.
Long though the years may seem to be,
  Memory's longer yet;
Thousands of miles across the sea,
  Trust me not to forget!

London: Strangeways, Printers.

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